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**Article — Published Version**

## The Rise of Fiscal Capacity: Administration and State Consolidation in the Holy Roman Empire

Econometrica

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*Suggested Citation:* Cantoni, Davide; Mohr, Cathrin; Weigand, Matthias (2024) : The Rise of Fiscal Capacity: Administration and State Consolidation in the Holy Roman Empire, *Econometrica*, ISSN 1468-0262, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, Vol. 92, Iss. 5, pp. 1439-1472, <https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA20612>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/306222>

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# THE RISE OF FISCAL CAPACITY: ADMINISTRATION AND STATE CONSOLIDATION IN THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

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This paper studies the role of fiscal capacity in European state consolidation. Our analysis is organized around novel data on the territories and cities of the Holy Roman Empire in the early modern period. Territories implementing an early fiscal reform were more likely to survive, increased in size, and achieved a more compact extent. We provide evidence for the causal interpretation of these results and show key mechanisms: revenues, military investments, and marriage success. The imposition of Imperial taxes, quasi-random in timing and size, increased the benefits of an efficient tax administration on the side of rulers, driving the implementation of fiscal centralization. Within territories, Chambers became the dominant administrative institution, tilting the consolidating states toward absolutism.

KEYWORDS: Fiscal capacity, state competition, war, Germany.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE AGES WAS DIVIDED into hundreds of territories with limited and uncertain extent of their monopoly of power and overlapping jurisdictions. By the end of the early modern period, this territorial landscape had undergone a profound process of institutional innovation and state consolidation: the number of territories was substantially reduced, their competences and sovereignties clearly defined, and the princes' capacity to rule and tax was mostly uncontested (North and Thomas (1973), Jones (1981), Tilly (1990)). This development marked the transition from informal, personalized arrangements to a structured, institutionalized system of rule. As fragile states with low fiscal and state capacities to this date exist in many parts of the world, the trajectory of Europe in the past half millennium stands out as remarkable.

In this paper, we study the role of a crucial institutional innovation in the Holy Roman Empire—the development of fiscal capacity through permanent administrations—in fostering this historical development (Hintze (1975), Schumpeter (1991)). Between the 16th

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Helpful and much appreciated suggestions, critiques and encouragement were provided by Isaiah Andrews, Charles Angelucci, Mathias Bühler, Mark Dinuccio, Torsten Persson, David Schönholzer, Jesse Shapiro, Erik Snowberg, Elie Tamer, Joachim Voth, Jonathan Weigel, and Noam Yuchtman as well as seminar and conference participants in Berkeley, UBC, Brussels, Columbia, Frankfurt (Max Planck Institute), Göttingen, Harvard, UC Irvine, Lisbon (Nova SBE), LSE, Lyon (ENS), Milan (Università Cattolica), Oxford, Stockholm (IIES), Tel Aviv, and Toulouse as well as by four anonymous referees. Refer to data documentations for additional acknowledgments. Financial support from the Munich Graduate School of Economics, the Egon Sohmen Foundation, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft through CRC-TRR 190 and in the framework of the German Excellence Strategy EXC2126/1-390838866 is gratefully acknowledged.

and the 18th century, several rulers introduced permanent offices, staffed by professionally trained bureaucrats, in charge of centrally collecting and organizing revenues, and replacing personalized, local, or ad hoc systems. These offices, mostly called “Chambers” (*Hofkammer* or *Rentkammer*), substantially increased the efficiency of princely revenue collection and spending, and thus allowed to project military, political, and diplomatic power.

We find that, after centralizing their fiscal administration in Chambers, territories embarked on a process of state consolidation: they were more likely to survive, increased in size, and were able to achieve a more compact (cohesive) territorial extension. We show four key mechanisms through which the princes of the Empire were able to consolidate and strengthen their territories following the establishment of Chambers: higher revenues; a reduction of short-term lending, as measured by the number of cities pawned to other rulers; more investments in military infrastructure, improving defensive capability; and increased success in marrying daughters to powerful princes. This development took place outside the early parliaments, but instead was closely tied to the sovereign’s financial administration, paving the way for German territories to become bureaucratic-absolutist states.

As a loose confederation of hundreds of largely sovereign states of varying size, the Holy Roman Empire provides an ideal setting in which to study the genesis and consequences of this institutional innovation. In contrast to existing literature that focuses on few, ex post successful territories such as Prussia or England, we observe all territories and cities of the Empire at the yearly level, thereby overcoming selection (survivorship) bias.<sup>1</sup>

Laying the groundwork for our analysis is a major, novel data collection. We construct a data set providing a complete picture of both cities and territories in the Holy Roman Empire. We link each city in the *Deutsches Städtebuch* (Keyser, Johanek, Engel, and Stoob (1939–2003)), a detailed encyclopedia of 2382 cities in Central Europe, to its ruling dynasty for every year between 1400 and 1789. Aggregating this information, we can identify all territories ruling over at least one city and trace their existence, size, and shape. We can describe their mergers, break-ups, expansions, or losses as a consequence of wars, treaties, or dynastic changes. We further identify rulers of secular territories in an extensive kinship and marriage network of noble families. The resulting data set encompasses 102,825 observations at the territory  $\times$  year level, 15,568 rule transitions, 636 distinct territorial entities, and 2799 rulers of secular territories.<sup>2</sup>

Complementing these data, we document the date of adoption of centralized fiscal institutions (“fiscal centralization”) for 39 territories in the period between the 16th and the 18th century. We also collect exhaustive information about other territorial institutions and characteristics, such as estates and advisory councils, requests to process Imperial taxes, and features of a territory’s military history, internal composition, and geography.

We first offer a conceptual framework motivated by historical evidence. Chambers are institutions that concentrate knowledge on fiscal matters in a specialized layer of the territorial administration. When introducing a Chamber, rulers weigh the benefits of reducing

<sup>1</sup>Tilly (1975) points out this fundamental selection problem: “Most of the European efforts to build states failed. The enormous majority of the political units which were around [...] in 1500 disappeared in the next few centuries, smashed or absorbed by other states-in-the-making [...] The disproportionate distribution of success and failure puts us in the unpleasant situation of dealing with an experience in which most of the cases are negative, while only the positive cases are well documented” (pp. 38–39).

<sup>2</sup>Some analyses are conducted at the city  $\times$  year level, yielding 826,408 observations.

fiscal complexity through bookkeeping and accounting, which vary with fiscal demands over time, against fixed adoption costs.

We argue that the need to levy an Imperial tax was a main exogenous driver of Chamber adoption: at irregular intervals, princes were required to contribute to the military expenditures of the Empire, for example, for the campaigns against the Ottoman troops. Princes could costlessly pass these taxes through to their subjects, but with a sophisticated fiscal bureaucracy in place, they could retain monetary gains from a more efficient handling of the tax. Consistent with this incentive, we find that Chambers are more likely to be installed immediately following a taxation request by the Imperial Diet.<sup>3</sup>

Next, we analyze the consequences of fiscal centralization for the territories. We establish that the adoption of fiscal centralization reduced a territory's likelihood of vanishing in an immediate, permanent, and substantial way. Following fiscal centralization, territories also increased in size, specifically for cities over which they rule exclusively, suggesting that fiscal centralization leads to a greater ability to project state capacity and resolve conflicts of shared control over regions. This increase in territories' sizes also allowed rulers to achieve a more compact extension, with fewer enclaves and exclaves.

We argue that these results likely represent a positive, causal effect of the introduction of fiscal institutions. A challenge is that the effect of Chambers unfolded over time, rather than representing an immediate, one-off treatment effect. To tighten the link between slow-moving state consolidation outcomes and our treatment, we devote careful attention to potential confounders and treatment mechanisms. Our analysis includes city/territory and year fixed effects. Event studies of our outcomes of interest do not exhibit immediate pretrends. We can control for potentially time-varying, territory-specific confounders, like the external threat environment or concurrent institutional changes within territories such as early parliaments (Estates) or advisory councils. To account for unobservable, time-varying shocks to groups of similar territories, we consider a wide range of matching approaches, and an analysis of the intensive margin, that is, the subset of territories that eventually adopt a Chamber. To speak more directly to endogeneity concerns, we consider a shift-share instrumental variables framework, in which we exploit the quasirandom timing and size of the Imperial war tax, which increased the likelihood of Chamber adoption. Finally, we address potential concerns about heterogeneous treatment effects; our results are robust to excluding single territories, and also hold up when employing robust estimators.

Turning to mechanisms, we show how Chambers shifted the internal performance of territories, and how these immediate changes slowly allowed territories to survive, become larger, and more compact. First, historical evidence shows that revenues increase shortly following fiscal centralization. In the broader sample of our data set, we demonstrate that territories with a Chamber reduce their reliance on inefficient, short-term pawns of cities.<sup>4</sup> After the adoption of a Chamber, territories invest considerably more in military infrastructure, making them less likely to lose cities due to military attacks. Moreover, these territories improved the outcomes of their strategic marriage diplomacy. We demonstrate that rulers with centralized fiscal administrations who also had better ac-

<sup>3</sup>No territory in this analysis was directly affected by Ottoman campaigns, which took place on the eastern borders of the Holy Roman Empire. Hence, the incentive structure for the introduction of a Chamber was only affected through fiscal considerations as mandated by the Imperial Diet, not through direct war exposure.

<sup>4</sup>For the vast majority of territories of that time, raising sovereign debt was not a feasible path to increase revenue, due to massive commitment problems (North and Weingast (1989), Drelichman and Voth (2014)). Arguably, access to credit was easier for city states (Stasavage (2011)), which are not the focus of our study.

cess to these fiscal, military, and diplomatic mechanisms experienced higher consolidation outcomes than those for which these mediating channels were shut off.

Our paper contributes to a broad array of research. The historical development of fiscal capacity has been studied since the early work by [Hintze \(1975\)](#), [Tilly \(1975\)](#), [Brewer \(1989\)](#), or [Bonney \(1999\)](#). More recent work focuses on the role of fiscal capacity in fostering economic development ([Besley and Persson \(2011, 2013\)](#)), or on major fiscal innovations of the 18th and 19th century ([Dincecco \(2009, 2015\)](#), [Dincecco and Katz \(2016\)](#)). Theories of the organization highlight the role of specialized administrative layers to better aggregate information and address more complex tasks ([Garicano \(2000\)](#)). Following [Snowberg and Ting \(2022\)](#), we map this framework onto the early build-up of fiscal institutions. Our work provides an empirically grounded, longer-term view of the development of fiscal capacity; it also examines a complete array of cases, from small to large territories.

A rich literature speaks to the formation of the European state system in the early modern period ([Schönholzer and Weese \(2022\)](#), [Huning and Wahl \(2023\)](#), [Fernández-Villaverde, Koyama, Lin, and Sng \(2023\)](#), [Ottinger and Voigtländer \(2020\)](#)), with a focus on the role of warfare in consolidation ([Tilly \(1990\)](#), [Besley and Persson \(2008, 2009\)](#), [Gennaioli and Voth \(2015\)](#), [Dincecco and Onorato \(2016, 2017\)](#)). The role of fiscal institutions in state consolidation has not been studied extensively.

Our findings also relate to research on fiscal capacity in contemporary developing economies, which frequently feature information gaps similar to our historical context ([Pomeranz and Vila-Belda \(2019\)](#)). A series of recent papers has combined the historical origins of fiscal capacity and the study of present-day fragile states, yielding insights on the origins of taxation ([Sánchez de la Sierra \(2020\)](#)), on the taxation-representation nexus ([Weigel \(2020\)](#)), and on tax enforcement under low capacity ([Balán, Bergeron, Tourek, and Weigel \(2022\)](#), [Bergeron, Tourek, and Weigel \(2024\)](#)).

Finally, the literature has frequently emphasized the link between levying taxes and political participation ([North and Weingast \(1989\)](#)). Our findings suggest that in the Holy Roman Empire, the taxation-representation nexus was resolved in favor of rulers, who erected absolutist states at the expense of estates. Complementing our research, the work by [Becker, Ferrara, Melander, and Pascali \(2022\)](#) studies the link between conflict, political representation through city councils, and city-level fiscal capacity, mainly focusing on the late Middle Ages (approximately 1200 until 1550).<sup>5</sup> Our study further enriches our understanding of the institutional “bifurcation” ([Cox, Dincecco, and Onorato \(2022\)](#)) between parliamentarism and absolutism—adding to the well-known cases of England, where full parliamentary control over taxes developed, and France or Spain, where the Estates General or Cortes were sidelined ([North and Thomas \(1973\)](#)). Other studies have also emphasized the role of bureaucracy, rather than representation, in the buildup of fiscal capacity outside of Western Europe ([Frankema and van Waijenburg \(2022\)](#), [Martinez, Chiovelli, and Fergusson \(2023\)](#)).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we explain the political and historical context to the development of fiscal capacity (Chambers) in the Holy Roman Empire. In Section 3, we introduce our novel data sets. In Section 4, we analyze the origins of fiscal centralization; in Section 5, we consider main effects; and in Section 6, mechanisms. Section 7 concludes.

<sup>5</sup>The fiscal bureaucracies of princes developed independently of fiscal capacity at the urban level, and they served different financing purposes. Rulers might have interacted with urban institutions at territorial diets that summoned representatives of cities, clerics, and landed nobility. The role of cities in these diets was limited, and the diets ultimately had no say over the development of fiscal institutions of rulers.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. *The Holy Roman Empire: Territories and Territorial Competition*

The Holy Roman Empire existed from the 9th until the beginning of the 19th century in Central Europe. We focus on the period between the Late Middle Ages and the Napoleonic era, 1400–1789, a time that saw large shifts in both fiscal institutionalization and state consolidation. The Empire consisted of a large number of territories, both secular (such as kingdoms, dukedoms, and free imperial cities) and ecclesiastical (such as prince-bishoprics), and was headed by an elected emperor (Whaley (2012a, 2012b)). Rather than with the Emperor, territorial sovereignty increasingly lay with the rulers of these constituent territories, who decided on the administrative and fiscal organization of their lands (Klein, 1974, p. 3). At the heart of territorial politics were familial connections between and within noble dynasties: Sons of secular rulers inherited their fathers' territories, and marriages strengthened or fractured alliances.

All territories foremost aimed to survive in this institutional setting: they faced threats of annexations or financial dependence. To ensure survival, territories aimed to acquire new land holdings to extend demesne areas, and to achieve a more compact shape for ease of administration and defense. Acquisitions were driven by peaceful means of inheritance claims through strategic marriages, outright purchases of land, as well as by means of warfare.

The transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period marked the move from states based on feudal relationships between individuals (*Personenverbandsstaat*) to states defined by geographic, not personal boundaries (*Flächenstaat*) in adaptation to changing economic and political circumstances (Mayer (1956), Power (1999), Schubert (2006), Rutz (2018)). State structures were separated from the ruling dynasty, as sovereigns created bureaucratic, institutionalized offices to ease their administrative burden (Möckl (1990, p. 97)).

### 2.2. *Early Territorial Finances: Dues, Estates, Pawns*

In the early Middle Ages, fiscal capacity in the territories of the Empire was low. Local offices (so-called *Ämter*) were in charge of revenue collection and spending of princes. Revenues came from demesnes, which were tied to geographic and geological features of territories, and were accessible without sophisticated levels of fiscal capacity: metal, salt and coin monopolies, forests, tolls, and tariffs (Klein (1974, p. 12)). The ruler had absolute power over these income sources (Heß (1993, p. 18)). As an alternative means to secure simple, short-term revenues, rulers pawned parts of their land holdings to local nobles, who were granted limited privileges over that land in exchange for money.<sup>6</sup>

All sources of revenues were extracted locally to provide for the prince and his court. The immediate, local consumption of surplus implied little need for bookkeeping. A so-called *Landrentmeister* was entrusted with fiscal matters. He was in charge of collecting local surpluses, auditing local offices in an ad hoc manner, and without presiding over a formal institution. This was by no means a central financial administration (Isenmann (1999, p. 247)), and the collection of revenues was disconnected from princely spending

<sup>6</sup>The practice was widespread: In Albertine Saxony, around half of the princely demesnes were pawned away at the turn to the 16th century (Schirmer (2006, p. 83)). This patchwork of land pawns was complex to administer and constantly at risk of being removed entirely from the ruler's demesnes: Ownership was often not documented carefully, and pawns removed income sources, making it harder to redeem the pawn in time.



(Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 129)). As a result, the structure of demesne income was highly complex: it rested on bundles of various and often overlapping usage rights of different local demesne types, which were often partly pawned away, and often relied on customary rights. In the absence of centralized, consistent bookkeeping, princely income was raised and spent inefficiently.

Thus, as fiscal needs increased at the turn to the 16th century—spurred by feuds between territories, the growing costs of holding court, and a rise in the costs of war technology—rulers and their small administrations were increasingly overwhelmed (Ertman (1997, p. 8)).<sup>7</sup> Due to their importance and complexity, fiscal tasks placed a disproportionate burden on the day-to-day proceedings of the administration, and the costs associated with the administrative efficiency loss surged (Reuschling (1984, p. 234)).

Raising new taxes was no viable path to compensate for efficiency losses within administrations. The right to approve and deny taxes lay with the Estates (Finer (1997, p. 1027)), which represented towns, clergy, and nobility/knights, and were convened at irregular assemblies (diets). Taxation requests were designated for specific, predetermined purposes, and decided upon on a once-off basis.

### 2.3. *The Introduction of Chambers*

When faced with a high burden of fiscal demands, rulers had an incentive to improve their efficiency of raising and spending revenues. This required a reform of territories' fiscal administration, giving rise to specialized, central institutions, so-called Chambers (usually *Hofkammern* or *Rentkammern*) (Klein (1974, p. 16)). The timing of the first introduction of Chambers in the early 16th century reflects the increasing necessity to solve complex fiscal problems within the princely bureaucracy. By adding a layer of specialization to the territorial organization, which replaced single individuals such as the *Landrentmeister* with abstract, rule-bound institutions, Chambers were a central step in the transition to a modern state administration (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 331)).<sup>8</sup> As such, Chambers are best understood in a framework of knowledge hierarchies (Garinano (2000)), in the context of building state or fiscal capacity, rather than companies or private organizations (Snowberg and Ting (2022)).

The Chamber was mandated to centralize the accounts of all local offices. It documented demesne income and used the revenue collected from these sources to make payments in the name of the prince.<sup>9</sup> Consistent bookkeeping was established through fixed procedures for audits and visitations of local offices (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, pp. 343, 128)).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The secondary literature abounds with terms like the “tremendous pileup of tasks,” and the “flooding” (Reuschling (1984, pp. 20, 109)) of offices, with which they could only narrowly “cope” (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 107)).

<sup>8</sup>We treat as “Chamber” only institutions that are separate from a specific person, that is, an institution that is collegially organized (Zimmermann (1933, p. 69)). Württemberg is a representative example of Chamber organization with one Chamber master supervising six *Räte* (councillors), one secretary, one bookkeeper (extended to two in 1543), and four scribes (Bütterlin (1977, p. 11)).

<sup>9</sup>Early Chamber ordinances reflect this aim of giving coherence to spending and revenue collection. A Bavarian Chamber ordinance of 1550 states that the Chamber was handed over “the entire income and spending, so that [the officials] have full administration in the entire duchy” (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 331)). Similarly, in Hesse, “the Chamber master will be the collector, the Chamber scribe the spender.”

<sup>10</sup>Accounting, accomplished through audits and visits of local offices by officials, was the main tool of Chamber administrators, as has been documented extensively (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 343)). This

Importantly, the Chamber entirely relied on existing privileges (demesnes and dues), which it sought to exploit better. The ruler did not levy new taxes or receive extended privileges as a consequence of Chamber adoption (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 136)). Its financial endowment and proceedings were entirely separate from the financial means that needed consent of the Estates. Neither was the Chamber an instrument to discipline princely expenses (Reuschling (1984, p. 115)), or to limit corruption of high-ranking or local officials.<sup>11</sup>

The evident advantage of this central, collegial office was the concentration of fiscal expertise in a new layer within the territorial hierarchy. The complexity of fiscal administration required “the formation of institutional, specialized knowledge” (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 107)).<sup>12</sup> Through its professionalized approach to tax collection, the Chamber tracked the productivity of local offices, prevented the alienation of income sources, and narrowed the information gap. This reduced the efficiency loss in raising and spending revenues.<sup>13</sup>

Against these gains of efficiency foremost stood fixed costs of establishing this new institution within an existing territorial administrative framework, and of providing permanent offices and salaries for Chamber officials. As the complexity of fiscal problems changed across territories and across time, so did the incentives to adopt a Chamber. The concept of centralizing fiscal administration in a Chamber was first introduced to the Holy Roman Empire in the Habsburg realms at the turn of the 16th century. The first territory to fiscally centralize in our data is Württemberg in 1521. For many territories, the perceived benefits from an improved fiscal administration never outweighed the fixed costs of adopting a Chamber.<sup>14</sup> However, over the course of the following centuries, a substantial number of territories of the Empire introduced similar institutional arrangements (cf. Table A.1).

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was not only limited to monetary accounts: in Albertine Saxony, a Chamber official was to collect all charters and deeds of the prince-elector that had a financial dimension in a separate book so that these documents were always at hand. Central fiscal administration hence also first organized different administrative issues from an economic perspective (Press (1970, p. 102), Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, pp. 104, 128)).

<sup>11</sup>We discuss these potential alternative interpretations of Chambers at length in the Supplemental Appendix, Section B.1 (Cantoni, Mohr, and Weigand (2024)).

<sup>12</sup>Joachim Friedrich, the first ruler in Brandenburg who could rely on a Chamber throughout his entire tenure, stated in an ordinance how he was “dependent on well-formed advice and trusted supporters” (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 872 f.)). Similarly, the Austrian Chamber ordinance of 1568 stated that the volume of fiscal tasks “would be prohibitive for a single person to process on a permanent basis” (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 336)).

<sup>13</sup>In Hesse, Chamber ordinances for the first time introduced lists of villages within the princely demesnes and instituted regular reporting of local office administrators to the Chamber (Brakensiek (2004, p. 141 ff.)). The Supplemental Appendix, Figure A.1 shows that three decades later detailed revenue statistics for local offices existed. The Hessian Chamber ordinance of 1581 furthermore stated that all reductions in the revenues of an office should be personally reported to the sovereign to prevent alienation (Zimmermann (1933, p. 75, p. 41)).

<sup>14</sup>The small share of territories adopting Chambers is mainly a feature of the skewedness of the territory size distribution: restricting the sample to the 90th percentile of territory size in 1521, around 56% of the territories adopted a Chamber. Overall, there were substantial barriers to the spread of Chambers. From the perspective of contemporaries, the long-term benefits of Chambers remained obscured, as consolidation outcomes took hold slowly. Early modern rulers, instead, had short decision time horizons: they were often severely credit constrained (hence could not monetarize future benefits of Chambers), had imperfect knowledge of the future, and heavily discounted future territorial benefits (for which they could not be held accountable).



## 2.4. *Influence of Imperial Finances on Chamber Adoption*

A prominent incentive to adopt fiscal Chambers came from an innovation in Imperial finances, which tasked territorial rulers with the processing of Imperial taxes. The timing and size of these taxation requests, which financed Imperial warfare, were exogenous to the internal development of territories.

In the early 15th century, a series of defeats had demonstrated the inadequacy of the Imperial military infrastructure—the Empire itself possessed no army and no proprietary financial institutions. After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, an increased threat from the Ottoman Empire additionally affected the Eastern Habsburg lands. An early effort by the Holy Roman Emperor to levy taxes for Imperial military purposes was unsuccessful.<sup>15</sup>

In a new attempt to raise these taxes, the Imperial recess of 1530 set a precedent: It directly tasked territorial rulers to process the requested Imperial warfare funds. For this purpose, they were granted the right to “for all their subjects [...] create and levy a tax.” Later recesses confirmed these privileges (Schaupp (2004, p. 136)). Rulers had little room for noncompliance: they could be held personally accountable in Imperial diets to which they were convened regularly, and smaller territories faced the threat of having their right to participate in the Imperial diet revoked altogether. Compliance was also promoted by the ideological framing of the taxes as a “brave [...] Christian deed” (Koch (1747 [1530], § 118)) in the light of the increasing threat of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>16</sup>

The imposition of the Imperial tax followed a fixed protocol: The Imperial Register, the *Reichsmatrikel*, established at the Diet of Worms in 1521, assigned a fixed share of the imperial tax burden to each territory. At irregularly held Imperial diets, the Emperor would then request a total tax sum from the territories, which they would split up according to their register shares. For example, the Diets of 1566/67 approved six million guilders, the following Diet of 1570 approved 1.5 million guilders. Then, after a hiatus of 6 years, the Diet of Regensburg in 1576 approved 7.5 million guilders (Schulze (1978, p. 80)). Thus, while the relative shares of each territory were predetermined, the actual, required contributions changed at irregular intervals. This system proved highly successful for Imperial finances: Between 1500 and 1650, the amount of Imperial taxes raised is estimated to have increased tenfold, further demonstrating the high compliance of territorial lords (Whaley (2012a, p. 512)).

This arrangement, as a side effect, provided a considerable incentive for territorial rulers to introduce a Chamber, since the Imperial taxes needed to be processed by the princes’ fiscal administration. Better bureaucratic oversight increased the efficiency of revenue processing, and hence created a surplus that the prince could retain.<sup>17</sup> The size of this potential surplus comoved with the overall taxation amounts requested at Imperial diets.

## 3. DATA

### 3.1. *Territories, Cities, Lineages*

Our setting requires a complete picture of both cities and territories in the Holy Roman Empire. To do so, we construct the first data set linking each of the 2382 cities in

<sup>15</sup>The first Imperial tax, the Common Penny (*Gemeiner Pfennig*) of 1495, was suspended in 1505 and eventually abandoned in 1551; the Empire itself had to collect these taxes, and its fiscal capacity proved insufficient.

<sup>16</sup>Schulze (1978) documents the impossibility of noncompliance for rulers.

<sup>17</sup>In Hesse, for example, newly established princely coffers also held the Imperial taxes. These coffers served as the foundation of the fiscal administration (Brakensiek (2004, p. 140)).

the *Deutsches Städtebuch* (Keyser et al. (1939–2003)), an encyclopedic compendium on cities<sup>18</sup> in the Empire, to one or multiple rulers, for each year between 1400 and 1789. We note the kind of rule, the rule hierarchy (if there were multiple rulers), and the reasons for any rule changes. To construct these data, we additionally draw on an encyclopedia on German territories (Köbler (2007)), lineage trees of the majority of German and European noble families, numerous historical maps, as well as sources on individual cities, dynasties, and territories.<sup>19</sup> The resulting data set eventually features 826,408 observations at the city  $\times$  year level, including 15,568 changes of rulers, and belonging to 636 distinct territorial entities.

Building on this data set, we construct a series of variables that serve as primary outcomes in Section 5, or as measures of the mechanisms of interest in Section 6. Aggregating the information at the territory  $\times$  year level, we can measure the size of a territory (measured by the number of cities it rules over). We also code whether and when a territory ceases to exist, and the reasons for its disappearance (dynastic extinction, conquest, or purchase). Next, from the perspective of single cities, we can observe whether, when and why a city changes ruler, and whether the city is put in pawn to a secondary ruler.

Beyond its temporal evolution, territorial rule also had a spatial dimension. To approximate the spatial dimension of territorial holdings over the period considered (lacking detailed, year-to-year maps which reflect the complex layering of sovereignty), we draw Thiessen polygons (Voronoi partitions) around city centerpoints.<sup>20</sup> Aggregating city polygons belonging to the same ruler, we obtain a graphical depiction of the extent of every territory in a given year.<sup>21</sup> The Supplemental Appendix, Figure A.3 shows the resulting evolution of territorial borders for every century. Based on the shape of each territory's extent, we calculate several measures of compactness, or roundedness.

Finally, our data set also considers the dynastic (network) dimension of the territorial history of the Empire. We identify 2799 rulers of secular territories in an extensive kinship and marriage network of over 133,000 members of noble families from Marek (2018). For each individual, we know the dates of birth, death, and marriage, and a full set of offspring and marriage links between individuals. We assign rulers to their land holdings from Cantoni, Mohr, and Weigand (2019), and add the start and end years of their reign. Building on this, we calculate network-based measures of dynastic connectedness for territorial rulers across time.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>This data source covers all places within the borders of Germany in 1937 that at one point had a town charter. Note that few of these places were large, and even fewer (around 2.8%) were autonomously governed.

<sup>19</sup>For more information on the coding of the territories, refer to the documentation files available with Cantoni, Mohr, and Weigand (2019). We exclude all territories that do not belong to the Holy Roman Empire, as well as territories largely outside our area of analysis, such as Bohemia and the Further Austrian territories of the House of Habsburg.

<sup>20</sup>The Supplemental Appendix, Figure A.2 shows the location of these city centerpoints. See the documentation files available with Bogucka, Cantoni, and Weigand (2019) for details on the construction of polygons and point locations. Alternatively, we can draw modified polygons that take terrain ruggedness and river velocity into account (Bogucka, Cantoni, and Weigand (2019)); our results are robust to the use of either definition.

<sup>21</sup>This allows us to move beyond existing, coarse digital maps that have been used in the literature so far (e.g., Nüssli (2006)), and beyond maps that have been drawn by historians for single territories at selected points in time. We do acknowledge that exact borders of territories were ambiguous in the Middle Ages, but the assignment of cities to territories is clear during the entire time period of interest.

<sup>22</sup>Relatedly, Benzell and Cooke (2021) and Marcassa, Pouyet, and Trégouët (2020) also consider kinship and marriage networks of the European nobility.

### 3.2. *Territory-Level Institutions*

Complementing this detailed information on rulers, rule changes, and territorial holdings, we collect several measures relating to the fiscal-institutional development of these territories. Most importantly, we measure fiscal centralization, our key variable of interest. We construct a novel data set on the timing of the introduction of a Chamber in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire by supplementing and rigorously verifying information from a comprehensive handbook on the administrative history of Germany (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983)) with a large number of publications on fiscal and regional histories. We find evidence for fiscal centralization in 39 territories, which are listed in the Supplemental Appendix, Table A.1, along with the corresponding dates and the exact type of institution that was introduced. There is considerable variation in the timing of the introduction of a Chamber: Württemberg and Albertine Saxony are the first territories to fiscally centralize at the beginning of the 16th century, whereas Schaumburg-Lippe, Paderborn, and Reuß-Greiz first have a Chamber in the 18th century.<sup>23</sup>

The other major institutional development within princely bureaucracies were advisory councils. For all territories, which eventually adopted a Chamber, we collect information about the adoption of these councils (see the Supplemental Appendix, Table B.I). For these territories, we also note time periods in which Estates and territorial diets were active (see the Supplemental Appendix, Table B.II).

Finally, we map the territories in our data to the Imperial Register of 1521 (Zeumer (1913, p. 313–317)).<sup>24</sup> We also note the timing and size of the Imperial tax levy, to which territories had to contribute according to their share in the Imperial Register (Steglich (1972, pp. 54–55), Schulze (1978, pp. 79–80), Rauscher (2012, p. 345)). The Supplemental Appendix, Figure A.4 shows the distribution of contribution shares as well as the level and timing of the required Imperial tax contributions, which were raised 30 times between 1522 and 1740.

### 3.3. *Other Variables*

We collect an extensive set of additional information on the geography, economy, and conflict involvement of cities. We calculate distance to the closest sea coast or navigable river (Map 2 in Kunz (1991)). Measures of agricultural suitability are taken from the FAO's Global Agro-Ecological Zones (GAEZ) 2002 database,<sup>25</sup> matched to the Thiessen polygons of city borders. Similarly, we also calculate terrain ruggedness for the area surrounding each city. To assess mining suitability of a city's surrounding area, we identify town charters, which contained provisions on mining.

From the *Deutsches Städtebuch*, we extract information on construction events associated with military spending such as castles, arsenals, or fortifications, and pooled construction events as an economic indicator (Cantoni and Weigand (2020)). As another proxy for

<sup>23</sup>We are confident that territories did not fiscally centralize if there is no evidence of the existence of a Chamber. The historical literature agrees that fiscal centralization in the Empire set out in Württemberg in 1521, so we do not miss events before 1521. Also, there is broad variation in the size of territories with a Chamber, ranging from very large (such as Prussia) to comprising only a few cities (e.g., Münster or Trier). Similarly, we observe that some territories with a Chamber cease to exist in our coverage period, so that survivorship bias is unlikely.

<sup>24</sup>Similar data has been used in Cantoni (2012). We also assign Imperial Register shares from the repartition of 1648 from Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt (2008 [1663]) to our territorial entities.

<sup>25</sup>This data was kindly shared by Nathan Nunn due to the FAO download center being defunct at the time of writing this paper.

economic activity, we collect the number, type, and timing of markets in the covered cities (Cantoni, Mohr, and Weigand (2020b)). We document the presence of town charters to account for the (fiscal) developedness of cities (Cantoni, Mohr, and Weigand (2020a)). The *Städtebuch* moreover records attacks to cities, which we take as indicators of (defensive) conflict involvement and military threat to a territory.<sup>26</sup> Finally, we know the neighbors for each city. Combining this with information on territories, we record military construction events taking place in foreign neighboring cities, or whether a city has neighbors that belong to a fiscally centralized territory.

#### 4. ORIGINS OF FISCAL CENTRALIZATION

To speak to the empirically observed Chamber adoption patterns (Supplemental Appendix, Table A.1), the historical account of Section 2 suggests a stylized framework of (the timing of) fiscal centralization of the territories of the Empire:<sup>27</sup> The main benefit of introducing a Chamber, a specialized administrative layer in the territorial hierarchy, is an increased utilization rate of fiscal knowledge (Garicano (2000)). In the baseline without a Chamber, complex fiscal tasks cannot be addressed adequately even by the individuals at the top of the knowledge hierarchy (the prince and his advisors). This inadequate treatment of complexity results in an efficiency loss in raising and spending revenues from demesnes. Introducing a Chamber introduces a new layer to the territorial hierarchy that increases bureaucratic overview. For a given level of fiscal demands and demesne size, this narrows the efficiency gap, and hence benefits the princely finances. Changes in the size of fiscal demands primarily determine Chamber adoption. One salient shock to fiscal demands, and hence Chamber adoption, are the imposition of Imperial taxes: if the territorial ruler increases the efficiency of Imperial tax processing, he can retain a surplus that scales with the size of the taxation request. Such benefits stand against the fixed costs of introducing a Chamber, like setting up offices and employing Chamber officials. In each period, when deciding whether to introduce a Chamber, rulers consider these static efficiency gains and fixed costs.

We take this framework to our data and consider the adoption of Chambers. We estimate the treatment hazard of territories in a linear model. Our panel contains one observation for each territory existing in a given decade and the dependent variable (fiscal centralization) is a binary indicator of the introduction of the Chamber in a territory in that decade. Reflecting the absorbing state of this treatment, we omit a territory from our sample once it is treated.

Our regression equation is as follows:

$$Treated_{jt} = \beta X_{jt} + \alpha_j + \alpha_t + \varepsilon_{jt}. \quad (1)$$

It predicts the eventual adoption of the Chamber ( $Treated_{jt}$ ) at the territory-decade level, using a vector of covariates  $X$ . The regression includes a full set of territory and decade fixed effects,  $\alpha_j$  and  $\alpha_t$ .  $\beta$  can thus be interpreted as the effect of decade-to-decade changes in the variables contained in  $X$ . We multiply the dependent variable by 100.<sup>28</sup> Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

<sup>26</sup>Note that information on these attacks is not dyadic, so that we are agnostic about the identity of attacking troops throughout our analysis.

<sup>27</sup>A formal treatment of the adoption decision is provided in the Supplemental Appendix, Section C.

<sup>28</sup>In the Supplemental Appendix, Table D.I, we also consider a specification without entity fixed effects, following other hazard models estimated as linear probability regressions (Currie and Neidell (2005), Corno, Hildebrandt, and Voena (2020)). Instead, we control for the initial level of the variables contained in  $X$

The choice and grouping of covariates in  $X$  is informed by the stylized framework of Chamber adoption. We distinguish factors related to the geography, internal composition, and economy of territories, as well as proxies of external military pressure and a measure of the Imperial tax burden.<sup>29,30</sup>

Geographic conditions influenced the complexity associated with extracting revenues from a territory's demesnes. We thus include a vector encompassing average terrain ruggedness, distance to water, agricultural suitability, and the presence of mining activity in territory  $j$  in decade  $t$ . The efficiency loss associated with fiscal undertakings was moreover impacted by the internal capacity of territorial lords. We include the share of cities with secondary rulers, which proxies for the relative power of territorial lords, namely the local nobility, as well as the share of cities that are members of the Hanse or have a town charter, which indicates the presence of more powerful urban centers. Among factors that influence the (economic) size of the demesnes, we consider princely income sources related to the increasing commercialization during the late 14th and 15th century: the overall size of a territory (measured through the number of cities controlled), average construction activity, and the average number of market grants in this territory in the past decade.

We also turn to potential determinants of fiscal capacity that stem from fiscal demand shocks related to interterritorial conflicts (Gennaioli and Voth (2015)). We capture this with a vector consisting of the average construction of military buildings in neighboring territories and exposure to warfare over the last decade as well as the share of fiscally centralized neighbors. Finally, we look at a territory's contribution to the Imperial tax as a particular fiscal demand shock: the higher this taxation request, the larger the incentive to introduce a Chamber to process the request more efficiently.

Table I presents results from the OLS estimation as described in equation (1). Factors relating to the geography or internal composition of territories (or, changes thereof) are not statistically related to the Chamber indicator (p-values for joint significance of coefficient vectors shown in columns 1–2). Variables reflecting a territory's demesne economy, or exposure to external threats, are generally (positively) related to the adoption variable (columns 3–4). The natural logarithm of Roman Months levied, multiplied by the fixed contribution share, is significantly positively related to the Chamber indicator (column 5), also when considering all potential determinants jointly in column 6.

The Supplemental Appendix, Table D.I, column 1, shows the full set of coefficient estimates of the specification of Table I, column 6, as well as additional empirical approaches, including estimations with baseline controls and Cox hazard rate regressions. We obtain very similar results: the size of the Imperial tax contribution emerges as the only factor consistently significantly correlated with the Chamber adoption indicator throughout all specifications.

This predictive effect of Imperial tax levies is substantial: Conditional on a given share of contributions, being required to raise 10% more Roman Months (monetary equivalents) in a given decade increases the likelihood of fiscally centralizing in that decade by

$(X_{j,1500})$ , measured in 1500 (or at the earliest available time period for territories that start to exist after 1500), to recover the interpretation of  $\beta$  as an effect of relative changes in the variables contained in  $X$ .

<sup>29</sup>These factors correspond to the following model parameters: *Geography* and *InternalComposition* proxy for the baseline collection and spending inefficiency ( $\rho$ ), *Economy* proxies for the overall (monetary) demesne size ( $D$ ), *MilitaryPressure* is a source of fiscal demand shocks to territories ( $T$ ), and *ImperialTax* is explicitly modelled ( $IT$ ).

<sup>30</sup>We observe all covariates on a yearly basis and aggregate to the decade level. Note that all characteristics in  $X_{jt}$  are time-varying, since the extent of territories changes over time.

TABLE I  
PREDICTING FISCAL CENTRALIZATION.

	Fiscal Centralization					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Geographic (p-value)	[0.22]					[0.36]
Internal Power (p-value)		[0.38]				[0.87]
Commercial (p-value)			[0.03]			[0.59]
External Pressure (p-value)				[0.00]		[0.00]
Contribution (share) $\times$ ln Roman Months					0.876 (0.240)	0.849 (0.237)
Observations	10,520	10,520	10,520	10,520	10,520	10,520
$R^2$	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.14	0.14
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Decade FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of estimating equation (1). Observations are at the territory-decade level. The sample comprises 39 decades and 636 territories. The dependent variable is an indicator that reflects whether a territory  $j$  centralizes in year  $t$ . We omit the territory from our sample thereafter, reflecting the absorbing state of this treatment. Supplemental Appendix, Table D.I, column 1, shows the full set of coefficient estimates of the specification in column 6 above, as well as different empirical approaches, including baseline controls and Cox hazard rate regressions, in the remaining columns.

0.85 percentage points, against a baseline probability of 0.29 percentage points. This suggests that territories adopted a Chamber when required to process the Empire's taxation requests, taking advantage of the increased efficiency surplus from a centralized fiscal administration.

## 5. EFFECTS OF FISCAL CENTRALIZATION

In the eyes of contemporaries, as the will of Frederick the Great attests, “the first concern of a ruler has to be to survive, only then comes the question of enlargement” (Friedrich II. von Preußen (1769)). We thus consider survival and two aspects of territorial “enlargement”—size and compactness—to depict the major aspects of consolidation. We first turn to these ultimate outcomes of state consolidation, before considering mechanisms in Section 6.

### 5.1. Survival of Fiscally Centralized Territories

The most striking feature of state consolidation in the Holy Roman Empire was the survival of some territorial entities at a time when others vanished. To understand the role of fiscal centralization and test whether territories that became centralized were more likely to survive than those that did not, we estimate a linear probability model of the following form:

$$Vanish_{jt} = \beta_1 Treated_{jt} + \beta_2 Treated_{jt} \times DecadesTreated_{jt} + \alpha_j + \alpha_t + \varepsilon_{jt}, \quad (2)$$

where *Vanish* is a binary variable that reflects whether a territory  $j$  vanishes in year  $t$ . The specification is thus a hazard estimation in a linear probability setting, analogous to regression equation (1). We multiply the dependent variable by 100. *Treated* <sub>$jt$</sub>  is a dummy that takes value 1 if territory  $j$  is fiscally centralized at time  $t$ , and *DecadesTreated* <sub>$jt$</sub>  measures for how many decades territory  $j$  is already treated in year  $t$ . This allows the effect



TABLE II  
TERRITORIAL SURVIVAL: PROBABILITY OF VANISHING.

	Vanishing					
	Conflict and Conquest		Purchase		Extinction	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treated	−0.144 (0.0249)	−0.112 (0.0221)	−0.0501 (0.0136)	−0.0226 (0.0105)	0.0710 (0.124)	0.0706 (0.140)
Treated × Decades Since		−0.00413 (0.00175)		−0.00361 (0.00170)		0.0000514 (0.00924)
Observations	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825
$R^2$	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.03	0.03
Mean dep. var	0.13	0.13	0.06	0.06	0.21	0.21
Territory_FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of estimating equation (2). Observations are at the territory-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 636 territories. The dependent variable is an indicator that reflects whether a territory  $j$  vanishes in year  $t$ . We omit the territory from our sample thereafter, reflecting the absorbing state of this treatment. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level. The Supplemental Appendix, Table D.III shows results including only year fixed effects, and the Supplemental Appendix, Table D.IV includes only territories extant in 1500.

of fiscal centralization to change in magnitude over time.  $\alpha_j$  and  $\alpha_t$  are territory and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.<sup>31</sup>

The detailed nature of our data allows us to consider three major reasons for territorial vanishing: conflicts, purchase, and extinction of the ruling lineage. Vanishing by dynastic extinction, when a ruling family does not produce a potential heir, is the most common impediment to territorial survival; nearly half of all vanishing territories fall in this group. We consider dynastic extinction to constitute a largely uncontrollable part of territorial survival, whereas the remaining reasons are endogenous to a territory’s actions.<sup>32</sup>

Annexation was a constant threat for territories, which were unsuccessful in building foreign relations and military strength. An early example is the Burgravate of Dohna, which vanished in a conflict with the Margravate of Meissen over territory in the middle Elbe region in 1402. Similarly, rulers who resorted to selling lands risked ending up in a self-reinforcing circle of ever-growing land pawns and vanishing by purchase. In 1548, Count Berthold of Henneberg-Aschach sold off his last substantial land holdings to the Mansfeld family, thus dissolving the territory, which ended up with Albertine Saxony shortly thereafter.

Table II shows results.<sup>33</sup> Columns 1 and 2 indicate a significantly negative relationship between our treatment and an indicator of vanishing because of conflict. Columns 3 and 4 consider an indicator of whether territories cease to exist because they are sold, where

<sup>31</sup>The Supplemental Appendix, Table D.II explores different approaches to inference for all outcomes of Sections 5 and 6, including clustering at higher levels, and Conley standard errors. Significance is mostly unaffected, and clustering at the territory level is often the more conservative approach. Results also hold when additionally allowing for autocorrelation within units over time, with lag cutoffs of 50, 100, or 200 years (not shown).

<sup>32</sup>As late as 1799, in a territory as significant as the Electorate of Bavaria, the ruling family died out, even though they hired major specialists and underwent fertility treatments multiple times (Stein (2011)).

<sup>33</sup>Similar to Section 4, the Supplemental Appendix, Table D.III omits territory fixed effects, and the Supplemental Appendix, Table D.IV includes only territories extant in 1500. Again, we obtain very similar results throughout.

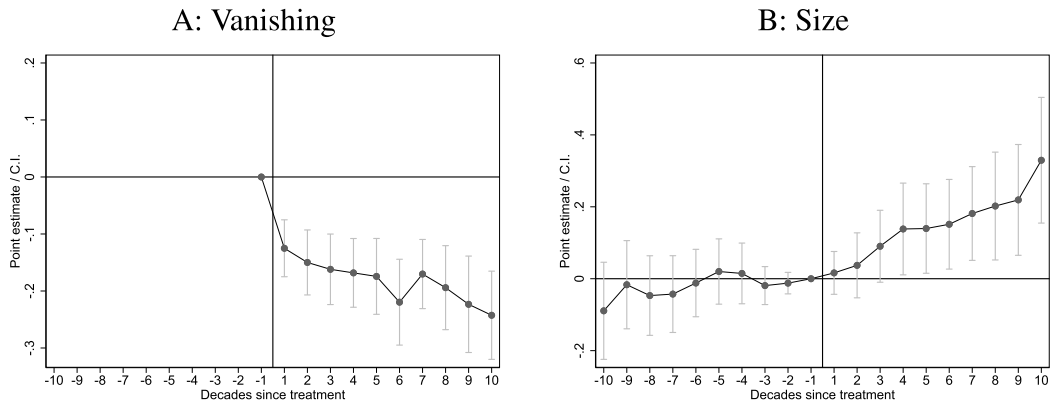


FIGURE 1.—Territorial Consolidation Event Studies (I). *Note:* The plot shows results of event study regressions of the effect of fiscal centralization on territorial survival and size, with 95% confidence intervals. Observations are at the territory-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 636 territories. The dependent variables are (A) a binary variable whether a territory  $j$  vanishes due to conflict or purchase in year  $t$ , (B) the natural logarithm of cities that  $j$  rules alone in  $t$ . Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

again there is a negative relationship. The last two columns instead show that coefficients on treatment variables are small and insignificant with respect to vanishing by extinction.

The fact that there are no differences between fiscally centralized and noncentralized territories in dynastic extinction due to the lack of (male) heirs is consistent with the view that this outcome could not be influenced by a territory's fiscal capacity. As opposed to the birth of male offspring, however, fiscal capacity increases the probability to survive due to military success and financial strength: There is a large, significant reduction of the probability of vanishing by purchase following fiscal centralization of around 84% of the baseline probability. We further examine these military and financial mechanisms in Section 6.

To examine vanishing dynamics over time, we estimate an event study framework:

$$Vanish_{jt} = \sum_{\tau=1}^{10} \beta_{\tau} Treated_{jt} \times RelativeDecade_{\tau(j,t)} + \alpha_j + \alpha_t + \varepsilon_{jt}, \quad (3)$$

where  $Treated_{jt}$ ,  $\alpha_j$ , and  $\alpha_t$  are defined as above. The analysis is at the territory-year level. We interact the treatment indicator with a set of relative decade dummies for the decades after treatment; the dummy for  $\tau = 10$  is defined to include all time periods ten decades or later relative to the year of treatment. Thus, for each decade after the introduction of Chambers, we estimate the probability of vanishing for treated territories relative to those territories not (yet) treated. Since our sample is conditional on a territory having survived up to time  $\tau$ , that is, the introduction of the Chamber, we cannot estimate  $\beta_{\tau}$  for  $\tau < 0$ .<sup>34</sup>

Figure 1, panel A, shows the probability of vanishing due to purchase or conflict (i.e., excluding dynastic extinction) over time. Following fiscal centralization, there is an immediate, clear, and sustained decrease in this probability (by about 20%), compared to territories without a Chamber.

<sup>34</sup>This baseline event study also includes never-treated territories. Since  $Treated_{jt}$  is zero throughout for these entities, they only enter the estimation via the year fixed effects.

### 5.2. Size of Fiscally Centralized Territories

A second important aspect of state consolidation is the size of territories. From 1400 to 1789, the size of the average territory increased substantially. In 1400, the average territory consisted of around 6 cities, and in 1789, this had doubled to 12 cities. While the largest territory in 1400 held 185 cities, the largest territory in 1789 consisted of 598 cities.

The financial efficiency of territories and their ability to grow in size were closely linked, and rulers spent large parts of their revenues to enlarge their territories. The case of Albertine Saxony shows how acquisitions were directly influenced by state revenue: after the introduction of a Chamber in 1524, the electoral prince spent 700,000 fl. in the next four decades to buy up rural estates, villages, and entire lordships (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 71, p. 816)).

Financial capacity was not only necessary to purchase additional land holdings directly, but also to acquire land by other, seemingly nonfinancial means such as inheritance and warfare. The case of Brandenburg—which installed a Chamber in 1577—in the first decades of the 17th century illustrates the manifold linkages between financial means and size. In 1614 and 1618, the Electorate incorporated Ducal Prussia and the Duchy of Cleves-Mark. Brandenburg's expansion hinged on its financial efficiency in three ways: The foundation for the territorial expansion was laid by building inheritance claims through strategic marriages. In 1591, the Elector of Brandenburg, Joachim Friedrich, had married his son Johann Sigismund to Anna of Prussia, which served as the basis for the claims to both the gain of Cleves-Mark and Ducal Prussia. In the case of Cleves-Mark, where the ruling dynasty died out in 1609, the inheritance claims were contested, as Philipp Ludwig of Palatinate-Neuburg also laid claim to the entire territory, giving rise to military disputes. The strength of Brandenburg's military forces ensured a division of the lands in which the larger part of Cleves-Mark went to the Electorate. Finally, disposable income played a direct role to complete the acquisitions, which necessitated large funds: 300,000 fl. to the King of Poland for Ducal Prussia, and 600,000 fl. for Cleves-Mark (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 872ff.)).

In Section 6, we demonstrate how the above factors—disposable income, and foreign relations through strategic marriages and warfare—were substantially influenced by fiscal centralization. A very direct mechanism through which Chambers influenced land holdings was through the introduction and improvement of bookkeeping. In Hesse, administrative statistics of the Chamber first documented the exact extent of the ruler's lands, powers, and privileges; changes were to be reported and discussed on an annual basis; by the late 16th century, there was no scope for the alienation of land pawns and fiefs from the sovereign's belongings (Zimmermann (1933, p. 41, p. 75)).

First, we test the reduced form relation between fiscal centralization and territory size. We estimate the following equation:

$$Size_{jt} = \beta_1 Treated_{jt} + \beta_2 Treated_{jt} \times DecadesTreated_{jt} + \alpha_j + \alpha_t + \varepsilon_{jt}. \quad (4)$$

The outcome  $Size_{jt}$  is the natural logarithm of cities in territory  $j$  in year  $t$ . The analysis is at the territory-year level.  $\alpha_j$  and  $\alpha_t$  are territory and year fixed effects. Ownership of cities in the Holy Roman Empire was commonly disputed between several rulers; in addition, cities frequently had a hierarchy of rulers, for example, as part of a pawn or a fief. To capture these aspects of state capacity, we consider for each territory the following dependent variables: (i) cities it rules alone, (ii) uncontested cities, and (iii) total number of cities.

Table III shows that there is a significant positive relationship between treatment status and the logarithm of the number of directly ruled cities in a territory ( $\beta_1$ ). This positive

TABLE III  
TERRITORY SIZE.

	Single Ruler		Uncontested		All	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Treated	0.225 (0.0608)	0.0696 (0.0485)	0.182 (0.0502)	0.0316 (0.0394)	0.169 (0.0506)	0.0419 (0.0378)
Treated $\times$ Decades Since		0.0203 (0.00471)		0.0196 (0.00508)		0.0166 (0.00467)
Observations	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825
$R^2$	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of estimating equation (4). Observations are at the territory-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 636 territories. The dependent variable is the natural logarithm of cities in territory  $j$  in year  $t$ . Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

association grows stronger over time ( $\beta_2$  in column 2), and it holds when considering the number of uncontested cities and the number of all cities—contested, given away, or ruled alone—in columns 3 and 4 and columns 5 and 6, respectively.<sup>35</sup>

We conclude that fiscally centralized territories grow larger over time, which points to territorial expansion taking hold gradually. A territory that has been fiscally centralized for 100 years controls around 27.3% more cities directly than before the introduction of a Chamber. Similarly, centralized territories hold 22.8% more uncontested cities and 20.8% more cities overall after having been fiscally centralized for 100 years. These results suggest that fiscally centralized territories are not only able to grow in size, but also that this growth is neither disputed by rivaling territories, nor shared with other stakeholders.

We also estimate the analogue of the event-study setup in equation (3). Additionally, we include a series of interaction terms for the decades prior to the treatment (with  $\tau = \{-10, \dots, 10\}$ ), where  $\tau = -10$  encompasses all periods ten decades or more prior to the year of fiscal centralization. This setup allows us to examine the timing of the increase in size following fiscal centralization and any potential pretrends in more detail. Figure 1, panel B, shows the relationship between fiscal centralization and territory size over time. There is no clear indication of a trend in territory growth before the adoption of a Chamber. After fiscal centralization, the event study graph shows a clear increase in size over time, consistent with the positive estimates of  $\beta_2$  in Table III.

### 5.3. Compactness of Fiscally Centralized Territories

Compared to today, the territorial fragmentation of medieval and early modern polities is visually striking. Often territories consisted of disconnected areas with many gaps in their land holdings. State consolidation led to more compact territories. Consider again the example of Brandenburg: following the annexations between 1600–1625, which had fragmented the belongings, territorial growth in the following century rounded off the territory, even connecting previously separate parts of the Brandenburg lands (Supplemental

<sup>35</sup>These results on territory size also hold if we exclude city states, which arguably have different means of organizing their finances (Stasavage (2007)) from the analysis.

Appendix, Figure A.5). Just as with overall size increases, achieving a more rounded territory hinged on the acquisition of lands, so that the factors discussed in the context of size growth—from financial solvency to functioning bookkeeping—all apply.

Measuring compactness is not straightforward in a context in which territories sought, at the same time, both to expand and to round off the shape of their land holdings. Standard measures of compactness will, in general, not be invariant to overall size, and decline in value as territories grow: in the extreme, a territory that consists of only one city will have a large overall compactness.

We define two alternative metrics for compactness, both based on the underlying partition of Holy Roman Empire's area into polygons surrounding each city. The first measure captures compactness at the territory level. If a territory is maximally spread out, it consists of a set of disconnected cities; the length of its border is then equal to the sum of all city polygons' borders. In a more compact territory, cities will lie adjacent to each other, and thus their polygons will consist of longer "internal" (shared) borders. We thus define compactness as a ratio of "internal borders" (between ruled cities) to the length of all city polygons' borders in that territory. This measure is 0 for disconnected territories. As more cities from the same territory share borders, the measure gets larger. For example, our measure of territorial compactness for Brandenburg increases from 0.78 to 0.81 between 1625 and 1725.

Alternatively, we measure territorial compactness from the perspective of individual cities: for each city, we calculate the share of its associated polygons' border that is adjacent to cities under the same ruler. The measure reflects how territorial consolidation reduces border exposure for single cities. This approach allows for the inclusion of city fixed effects, accounting for possible differences in cities' innate potential for compactness, for example, because they are situated along the coast.<sup>36</sup>

We estimate the analogue of equation (4) with the above compactness measure as the outcome of interest (defined either at the level of territories  $j$  or of cities  $i$ , in each year  $t$ ). We multiply the dependent variable by 100. The specification with city-level compactness as the outcome of interest includes both city fixed effects  $\alpha_i$  and territory fixed effects  $\alpha_j$ .

Table IV shows results. Positive coefficients indicate that a larger share of borders are internal borders, that is, shared with cities of the same territory. We find a positive relationship between our treatment variable and the compactness measure for both levels of observation (columns 1 and 3), which is taking hold over time (columns 2 and 4). Our measure of territory-level compactness increases by around 4.4 percentage points in the first century after fiscal centralization (5.5 percentage points in the case of city-level compactness), compared to a baseline level of 11% (41%, respectively) on average for the control group. We hence find that fiscally centralized territories become substantially more compact after centralization, and that this process occurs over time.

Panels A and B in Figure 2 present coefficients from the event-study approach in equation (3) with our compactness measure at the territory or city level as an outcome. We find no changes to compactness in the decades prior to fiscal centralization in treated territories. After the introduction of a Chamber, there is a continued and sustained increase in compactness in all following decades.

#### 5.4. Robustness: Confounding Factors

The results of our previous analyses strongly suggest a positive association between the introduction of fiscal institutions and a range of outcomes relating to territorial consoli-

<sup>36</sup>  $DecadesTreated_{ijt}$  measures the number of decades a city has belonged to a fiscally centralized territory.

TABLE IV  
TERRITORIAL COMPACTNESS.

	Domestic Border			
	Territories		Cities	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treated	3.736 (1.239)	1.456 (0.941)	3.328 (1.098)	1.231 (0.991)
Treated $\times$ Decades Since		0.299 (0.105)		0.422 (0.142)
Observations	102,825	102,825	826,408	826,408
$R^2$	0.94	0.94	0.87	0.87
City FEs			✓	✓
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of estimating the analogue of equation (4), considering the compactness of territory  $j$  in year  $t$  as an outcome. Observations are at the territory-year level for the first two columns, and at the city-year level for the last two columns. The sample comprises 390 years and 636 territories (2382 cities). Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

dation and survival. However, this naturally raises the question about the causal nature of these correlations. Can these positive developments be interpreted as the effect of the introduction of fiscal chambers? Clearly, it is impossible to observe the path of territorial expansion and consolidation in the absence of a Chamber. In this section, we offer a carefully optimistic take, suggesting that the results shown so far likely represent in fact a positive, causal effect of the introduction of fiscal institutions.<sup>37</sup>

The baseline research design, with panel data regressions and two-way fixed effects, takes into account two major groups of potential omitted variables relevant in this con-

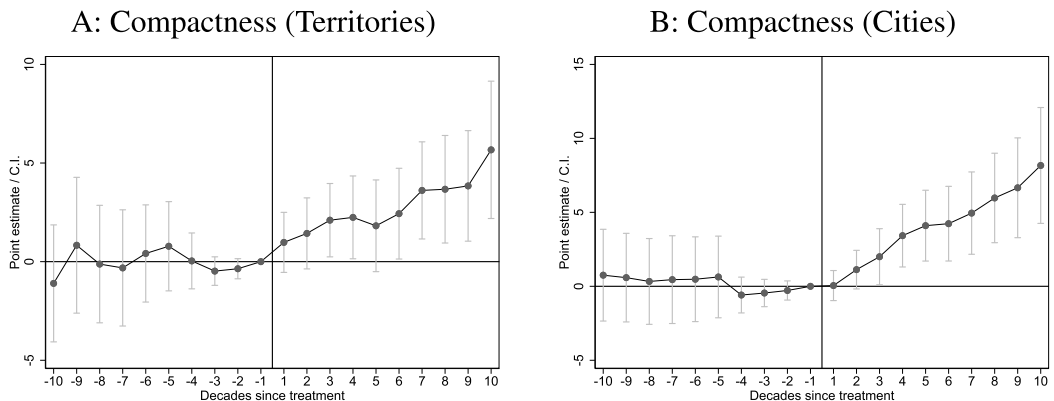


FIGURE 2.—Territorial Consolidation Event Studies (II). *Note:* The plot shows results of event study regressions of the effect of fiscal centralization on territorial compactness, with 95% confidence intervals. Observations are at the territory-year level for panel A and at the city-year level for panel B. The sample comprises 390 years and 636 territories (2382 cities). The dependent variables are the compactness measure defined either (A) at the level of territories  $j$  or (B) of cities  $i$ , in each  $t$ . Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

<sup>37</sup>Section 6, which is concerned with mechanisms, further bolsters this claim by more explicitly connecting Chambers to ultimate consolidation outcomes.



text. These could be time-invariant characteristics of territories, which affect both their propensity to invest in fiscal capacity and to consolidate, such as core geographic features; or, they could be historical shocks affecting all territories in equal measure, such as technological paradigm shifts from the military revolution.

Furthermore, the event-study analyses of Figures 1 and 2 show that the introduction of a Chamber represents a distinct break from the periods preceding it. This absence of immediate pretrends speaks against territories embarking on paths of successful expansion and consolidation *before* reforming their fiscal institutions.<sup>38</sup>

Our empirical setting is particularly challenging since the effect of the Chambers takes hold slowly. As such, it is more difficult to disentangle differences in long-term trends from the effect of the reform; for example, some of our results are not robust to the inclusion of linear territory trends. However, a potential confounding factor would need to vary over time and across territories, roughly coincide with the adoption of a Chamber, and produce an immediate and persistent kink or discontinuity in consolidation outcomes.

To address this concern, we control explicitly for a range of time-varying, territory-specific potential confounders. First, we account for (possibly persistent) changes to the external political environment of a territory in the Supplemental Appendix, Section D.3. We control for past military attacks, military construction activity among neighbors, and the fiscal centralization of neighbors.<sup>39</sup>

Second, we examine potentially concurrent institutional changes within territories. If Chambers were part of a series of other reforms that modernized the state administration, our estimates would reflect the effect of an entire bundle of changes occurring at the same time. For princely administrations, the historical literature is clear that the only institutional innovation of importance comparable to the Chamber during the 16th and 17th centuries are advisory councils (*Hofräte* or *Geheime Räte*) (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983)). The historical accounts suggest that Chamber ordinances were decreed separately and were not immediately preceded or followed by council ordinances. In the Supplemental Appendix, Section B.2, we empirically explore the dates of introduction of these councils to demonstrate that other branches of the ruler bureaucracy do not confound our results.

Looking at the internal developments within territories more broadly, a large literature (Schumpeter (1991), Tilly (1975), North and Weingast (1989)) suggests a link between the increase in fiscal capacity and representative assemblies, approving the imposition of taxes and controlling revenue streams. However, the developments in the Holy Roman Empire differ from other parts of Europe with regard to the development of a taxation-representation nexus. In the Supplemental Appendix, Section B.3, we show that empirically accounting for Estates does not affect our results: Chambers did not form part of the coordination between local nobility, clergy, and towns, but instead were closely tied to the sovereign's finances and a bureaucratic-absolutist form of government. We hence

<sup>38</sup>Coefficients more than 70 years prior to Chamber adoption are less clearly centered at zero. Those decades often pertain to the 15th century, where coverage of treated territories declines substantially, leading to a relatively less balanced sample. This is especially relevant for the leftmost, pooled coefficient. In the Supplemental Appendix, Section D.2, we discuss case studies, which highlight how this institutional volatility might skew our early estimates.

<sup>39</sup>By focusing on control variables that are arguably determined outside a territory, we also avoid controlling for potentially endogenous developments. We acknowledge, however, the potential reflection problem, in a setting in which military investments and institutional innovations may be mutually interdependent. This is why these regressions are best seen as suggestive; reassuringly, our results are not particularly sensitive to the inclusion of these controls.

demonstrate that a wide range of potential confounders, which vary across territories and time periods do not affect our results.

Further concerns about unobservable, time-varying shocks to groups of ex ante similar territories can be addressed by varying the set of territories that are considered in the analysis. First, we restrict our sample only to territories that eventually fiscally centralize. In the Supplemental Appendix, Section D.3, we show that all our results are very comparable (both qualitatively and quantitatively) when referring only to the “intensive margin” of fiscal centralization.<sup>40</sup> Second, we implement a wide range of matching approaches. Based on the predictors in Section 4 in the year 1500, we predict the propensity to ever fiscally centralize in a cross-section Probit model. The Supplemental Appendix, Section D.4 displays the result of nearest neighbor matching, full matching, and only considering those territories in the 90th percentile of adoption probability (Supplemental Appendix, Tables D.XII, D.XIII, and D.XIV). Results are robust to considering these restrictive subsets only. We also repeat these three matching strategies for the size of territories in 1500, and for the tax contribution share in the Imperial Register of 1521. Again, results are robust.

### 5.5. *Robustness: Instrumental Variables*

Our results in Section 4 suggest that the variation in Chamber adoption is primarily driven by the quasirandom timing and size of the Imperial taxes (even after taking into account territory fixed effects and all other predictors in column 6 of Table I). This further limits the scope for a potential unobserved, coincident, persistent confounding factor.

To address endogeneity concerns more directly, we note that the interaction between the fixed contribution share and the overall size of the Imperial taxation request represents an idiosyncratic, time-varying driver of the likelihood to adopt a Chamber. We can thus employ this interaction term to construct an instrumental variable for our main regressions. Analogously to other “shift-share” instrumental variable settings, the share may be determined endogenously, but the temporal shocks are orthogonal (Borusyak, Hull, and Jaravel (2022)). To reflect the absorbing nature (i.e., weakly monotonically increasing state) of Chamber adoption, and in line with the simple model framework of the Supplemental Appendix, Section C, we define our instrumental variable as the maximum Imperial tax contribution a territory has faced up to year  $t$ .

We present and discuss the instrumental variable approach in the Supplemental Appendix, Section D.5. In particular, we argue that the conditions for a valid instrument—exclusion, random assignment, monotonicity, and relevance—hold. Nevertheless, two limitations apply to this exercise. First, the instrumental variable estimates only recover the treatment effect for compliers: the subpopulation of territories that were induced into the treatment by the external pressure of the Imperial tax contribution. The effects of fiscal centralization on our main outcomes are qualitatively similar, but larger than the OLS analogues. Potentially, returns to adopting a Chamber were higher for compliers than for territories that would have adopted a Chamber under all circumstances. In addition to only recovering the local average treatment effect, a second limitation stems from the fact that our treatment is binary and absorbing, whereas the instrumental variable is continuous. The analysis hence only allows for the estimation of a pre/post treatment

<sup>40</sup>Note that the results in the “intensive margin” analysis, by limiting the analysis to few, larger territories, also speak to concerns about violations of the SUTVA assumption and potential spillovers from larger territories to smaller, neighboring ones.

comparison, but not an interaction with “time since treatment,” and not an event-study analysis. This is particularly relevant in a context like ours, where for most outcomes, the effect of the treatment does not materialize immediately, but builds up gradually over time. Due to these limitations, we focus on the results of the OLS analysis in the main part of the text, leaving an important, but ancillary role for the IV approach.

### 5.6. *Robustness: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects*

A final concern relates to the possible heterogeneity of treatment effects: our estimates might be driven by the extraordinary consolidation of individual territories. Also, in the presence of heterogeneous treatment effects in staggered adoption designs, two-way fixed effects estimation procedures may not be robust, as suggested by recent literature ([Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#), [De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfœuille \(2020\)](#)). To address concerns about heterogeneity, we first note that our data does not only contain the more powerful or (eventually) most successful territories: its uniquely broad coverage allows us to observe every territory and every city in the Holy Roman Empire over the entire period 1400–1789. Also, our results are not driven by single outliers, such as the remarkable trajectory of Prussia: Supplemental Appendix, Figures D.2 and D.3 demonstrate that our results (both the difference-in-differences estimates and the event-study analyses) are robust to leaving out single territories from the treatment group. Finally, in the Supplemental Appendix, Table D.XXIII, we provide evidence that our two-way fixed effects results do not suffer from confounding heterogeneity, drawing on the estimator suggested by [De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfœuille \(2024\)](#).

## 6. MECHANISMS

### 6.1. *Revenues*

Levying and spending funds from their income sources was a complex task for most rulers at the dawn of the early modern period. Chambers were thus charged with a twofold objective: An improved exploitation of these existing sources of revenue, and a more efficient spending of levied funds at court. Hesse’s Chamber ordinance of 1568, for example, states the overarching goal of the institution as having to increase steady revenues from the existing demesnes and taxes ([Zimmermann \(1933, p. 102\)](#)).

Comprehensively documenting increases in revenues resulting from the introduction of a Chamber is challenging, as systematic recordkeeping was directly linked with the institution of the Chamber. Data about revenues in the periods prior to fiscal centralization are thus scarce. For two territories—Hesse and Albertine Saxony—revenue estimates spanning the periods before and after the reform exist.

Figure 3 depicts the evolution of revenues for these territories over time, with the vertical line indicating the year of the introduction of a Chamber. In both cases, funds increase following fiscal centralization. In Hesse, the substantial and sustained revenue jump of over 36,000 guilders in the decade between 1540 and 1550 stands out, even against the moderate pretrend in the period 1520–1540. In Albertine Saxony, drink excise tax revenues average 21,000 guilders yearly before the replacement of the *Landrentmeister* with a collegial Chamber in 1524; after the reform, revenues are stably at a higher level of approximately 26,000 guilders per year. Following the introduction of centralized fiscal Chambers, revenues in both territories thus increased. Historical accounts of Hesse ([Brakensiek \(2004, pp. 142–3\)](#)), Bavaria, and Brandenburg ([Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh \(1983, pp. 334, 884\)](#)) further confirm that rulers managed these substantial increases in revenues by relying on existing sources of revenues, rather than new forms of taxation.

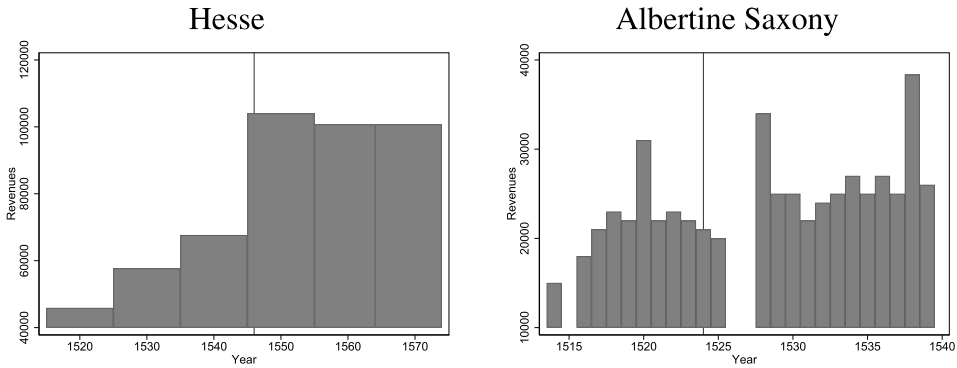


FIGURE 3.—Revenues. *Note:* The plot shows revenues in Hesse and Albertine Saxony before and after the introduction of a Chamber. Sources: Chamber revenue estimates for Hesse are drawn from North (1999). Albertine Saxony recorded revenues from a drinks excise tax, one of the ruler's primary sources of disposable income during the time period considered Schirmer (2006, pp. 235, 252–253, 605).

## 6.2. Alternative Methods of Raising Revenue

While revenues are observed directly only for a minority of territories, we indirectly test for improvements in fiscal administration: Better finances would reduce the reliance of rulers on pawning away land holdings to local nobility and wealthy burghers.<sup>41</sup>

Up to the introduction of Chambers, for a large number of rulers pawns were the predominant means of raising funds, since they provided short-term revenue without requiring improved fiscal capacity such as sophisticated bookkeeping. Rulers under financial pressure exhausted these means until very little of their territory remained under direct control, setting off a vicious circle of further financial pressure due to lower revenue streams. These lands could even be lost permanently, if sovereign rights were not exercised for a sufficiently long time, or the proofs of ownership were lost in the princely bureaucracy (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 790)). Keeping track of pawn arrangements also further complicated raising revenues from existing demesnes. Pawns were thus an inefficient and unsustainable way of raising revenue, and there were large incentives to redeem pawned settlements, forests, and acres.

For example, in 1561 the Chamber clerk in Hesse filed a complaint that he still found it impossible to cover expenditures from revenues of the local offices, since the majority of them had been put in pawn before. By 1569, the Chamber had redeemed 28 local offices, and it spent another 100,000 guilders in the following decade on redeeming pawns. A similar development can be traced for Albertine Saxony, where the largest ducal expenditures in the years following fiscal centralization (46,190 guilders) were spent on redeeming pawns.

Our data records pawnings of cities to secondary rulers at the yearly level. To estimate whether the introduction of a Chamber reduces the likelihood of a city being pawned, we estimate the analogue of equation (4) at the city level, where the dependent variable,  $PawnedCity_{ijt}$ , is an indicator whether city  $i$  in territory  $j$  is pawned to another ruler  $j' \neq j$  in year  $t$ . We again include a full set of city, territory, and year fixed effects.

Table V shows results. Cities in fiscally centralized territories are slightly less likely to be put in pawn (column 1). The decrease in pawning probability is immediate (column 2).

<sup>41</sup>Since rulers could command over their own land holdings autonomously, pawns did not require consent from the Estates (see Klein (1974, p. 19) or Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, p. 712)).

TABLE V  
PAWNING.

	City Put in Pawn		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Treated	−1.142 (0.855)	−1.190 (0.715)	−1.189 (0.710)
Treated × Decades Since		0.00976 (0.0956)	0.00564 (0.0956)
At Foreign Border			−0.528 (0.693)
Observations	826,408	826,408	826,408
R <sup>2</sup>	0.52	0.52	0.52
City FEs	✓	✓	✓
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓

Note: The table presents results of estimating the analogue to equation (4), considering whether city  $i$  was pawned to a territory  $j' \neq j$  in year  $t$  as an outcome. The sample comprises 390 years and 2382 cities. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

Results are similar when taking into account whether a city is located at the border to a foreign territory, which might make it more attractive for other rulers to pawn it (column 3).

A more informative picture emerges when considering changes in pawning probability over time, in the event-study graph of Figure 4, panel A. In the decade immediately after fiscal centralization, cities in centralized territories experience a sharp drop in their probability of being pawned. This effect slowly attenuates over the following decades, leading to the weakly significant overall effect estimated in the difference-in-differences regressions of Table V. The timing of effects suggests that the additional stream of revenues guaranteed by the new fiscal administration was immediately used by princes and Chamber officials to reduce the number of cities temporarily pawned away to other rulers—a step

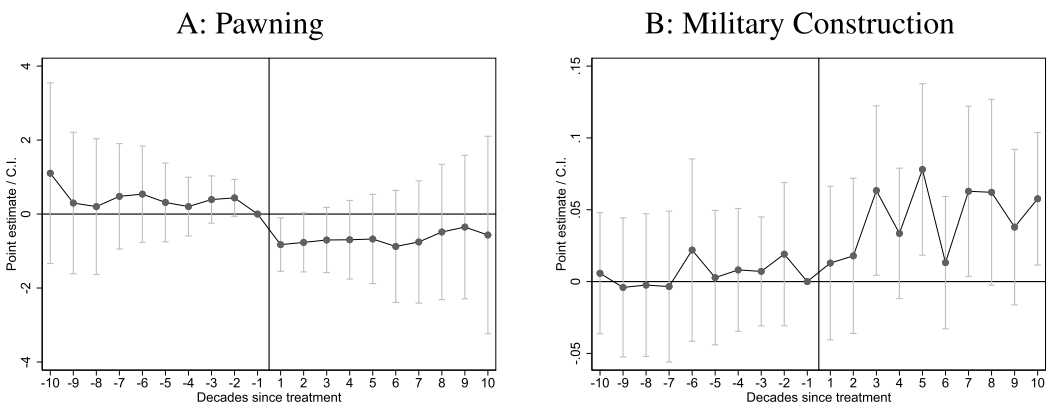


FIGURE 4.—Mechanisms Event Studies (I). Note: The plot shows results of an event study regression of the effect of fiscal centralization on pawning of cities and military construction, with 95% confidence intervals. Observations are at the city-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 2382 cities. The dependent variables are (A) an indicator whether city  $i$  in territory  $j$  is pawned to a territory  $j' \neq j$  in year  $t$ , (B) an indicator variable for new military construction in city  $i$  in year  $t$ . Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

TABLE VI  
MILITARY CONSTRUCTION.

	Military Construction				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Treated	0.0405 (0.0138)	0.0372 (0.0154)	0.0368 (0.0154)	0.0367 (0.0154)	0.0368 (0.0154)
Treated $\times$ Decades Since		0.000662 (0.00108)	0.000673 (0.00108)	0.000635 (0.00109)	0.000732 (0.00108)
Attack, past decade			0.0272 (0.0201)	0.0272 (0.0201)	0.0271 (0.0201)
Any Neighb. Mil. Constr., past decade				-0.0153 (0.0220)	
Near Foreign Cities				-0.00140 (0.00286)	
At Foreign Border					0.00756 (0.0105)
Observations	826,408	826,408	826,408	826,408	826,408
$R^2$	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
City FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of the analogue to equation (4), considering military construction events in city  $i$  in territory  $j$  in year  $t$  as an outcome. Observations are at the city-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 2382 cities. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

toward internal territorial consolidation, and an indicator of increased overall disposable revenue.<sup>42</sup>

### 6.3. Military Investments and Success

How exactly did rulers profit from this internal consolidation to expand the size of their territories and increase the probability of survival? Acquisitions through military interventions and marriage diplomacy strongly relied on financial means and bookkeeping, as do direct purchases of lands. In the context of warfare, Chambers usually were put in charge of handling relevant expenditures, especially for military buildings.<sup>43</sup>

We test for an increase in the number of military buildings in cities following fiscal centralization by estimating equation (4) at the city-year level, including relevant fixed effects. The dependent variable is an indicator variable for new military construction in a city  $\times$  year.<sup>44</sup> Results are shown in Table VI. Military construction increases by around 0.04 buildings per century (column 1). This is a significant and sizable effect, considering that average military construction in our sample amounts to 0.051 buildings per city in

<sup>42</sup>The leftmost, pooled coefficient, relating to observations more than one century prior to treatment, is not centered at zero in the case of pawning. As discussed in Section 5.4, we place less emphasis on these very early periods due to sample imbalance.

<sup>43</sup>Albertine Saxony is exemplary in that following the 1530s, expenditures for armories, fortresses, and defense increased substantially (Schirmer (2006, p. 569)).

<sup>44</sup>We multiply the dependent variable by 100, thus coefficients can be interpreted as increases per century.



a treated territory and century. The effect on construction does not become larger over time (columns 2 to 5).

One potential confounder is a change in the threat environment: military construction could increase more in centralized territories because these are attacked more. In column 3, we account for attacks to cities in the current decade. This does not affect military construction at conventional significance levels, and the treatment coefficient remains unaffected. We also add measures for the threat of war, such as military construction by neighboring foreign territories, and the number of foreign cities in the vicinity. Again, the coefficient of interest remains unchanged (column 4). The same holds when considering the length of the foreign border as another measure for the threat of war (column 5).

To examine the trajectory of building activity for military purposes over time, and to rule out the presence of immediate pretrends, we show event-study coefficients in Figure 4, panel B. Military construction is constant before and increases steadily after the introduction of a Chamber. After three decades, military construction mostly remains on an increased level compared to the decade prior to fiscal centralization.

Increased military investments can serve two purposes: they can allow to conquer new cities, thereby consolidating a territory's position and increasing the likelihood of survival, or they can allow to better defend existing cities. Our data set—in which we observe attacks to cities, but not the identity of the aggressors—allows to examine the defensive channel. To do so, we consider the relationship between rule changes for cities as a result of attacks in treated and untreated territories by estimating

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ChangeRuler}_{ij(t+1)} = & \beta_1 \text{Treated}_{ijt} + \beta_2 \text{Treated}_{ijt} \times \text{DecadesTreated}_{ijt} \\ & + \gamma_1 \text{Attack}_{ijt} + \gamma_2 \text{Attack}_{ijt} \times \text{Treated}_{ijt} \\ & + \delta M_{ijt} + \alpha_i + \alpha_j + \alpha_t + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

where *ChangeRuler* is an indicator whether city  $i$  changed from territory  $j' \neq j$  to territory  $j$  in a given year. The analysis is at the city-year level. *Attack* is a dummy whether a city is attacked in year  $t$ , and  $M$  is a vector of military covariates. We include city, territory, and year fixed effects.

The results in column 1 of Table VII show that cities that are attacked have a 1.2 percentage points higher probability of changing ruler, relative to a baseline probability of rule change of 0.65 in each year. However, if a city belongs to a fiscally centralized territory, the conditional probability of changing hands if attacked is essentially reduced to zero ( $0.109 = 1.246 - 1.137$ ).

As a plausibility check, we compare the effect of attacks on three different types of rule changes. The relevant interaction term ( $\text{Attack} \times \text{Treated}$ ) is sizable and significant only if the outcome considered is rule changes due to violence (column 2), but not for subsequent rule changes due to sales of cities or dynastic extinction (columns 3 and 4). This confirms that military investments following fiscal centralization substantially increase the defensive capabilities of territories.

#### 6.4. Marriages

While warfare constituted an important feature of early modern polities, the predominant forms of rule expansion were peaceful. Marriage alliances played a central role, both for sons—potential successors—and daughters of rulers.

Marriages were prestigious, and hence costly endeavors. Chambers, through their close relation to the private finances of rulers, were important to finance these undertakings.

TABLE VII  
RETAINING.

	Change Ruler Due To			
	All	Violence	Purchase	Extinction
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treated (t-1)	-2.156 (1.254)	-0.606 (0.473)	-0.114 (0.0497)	-0.557 (0.322)
Treated $\times$ Decades Since (t-1)	0.0360 (0.0230)	0.00473 (0.00697)	0.00133 (0.00122)	0.000417 (0.0138)
Attack	1.246 (0.339)	0.783 (0.247)	-0.00411 (0.0250)	0.0581 (0.153)
Attack $\times$ Treated (t-1)	-1.137 (0.373)	-0.734 (0.266)	0.0133 (0.0250)	-0.0668 (0.148)
Observations	826,408	826,408	826,408	826,408
$R^2$	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.03
Mean dep. var	0.65	0.07	0.04	0.23
Military Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓
City FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of equation (5). Observations are at the city-year level. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level. The sample comprises 390 years and 2382 cities. The dependent variable is an indicator whether city  $i$  changed from territory  $j' \neq j$  to territory  $j$  in a given year. Military covariates are the natural logarithm of military buildings in a city and an indicator whether a city is located at a foreign border.

Albertine Saxony in the years of a Chamber's introduction illustrates this point. To successfully marry off the ruler's daughter Magdalene to Joachim II of Brandenburg, a prince who had been previously offered the hand of the French king's daughter, the Albertine Chamber paid 20,952 guilders of dowry. Lavish wedding ceremonies also burdened rulers' treasuries as 3000 guests had to be entertained, including 24 princes of the Empire (Schirmer (2006, pp. 275–6)). While marriage arrangements served to signal and secure prestige, they foremost had very tangible territorial consequences: In case of a lineage's extinction, inheritance claims were made based on marriage ties.

We quantify the strength of inheritance claims and ties to powerful dynasties in a graph of kinship and marriage connections. We observe the yearly network between members of noble families, and use it to calculate the marriage success for all daughters of territorial rulers.<sup>45</sup> Marriage success is defined as the change in dynasty connectedness resulting from the union. To measure dynasty connectedness, we count the number of territorial rulers within three degrees of family separation (kinship or marriage) in a daughter's network, as well as the number of cities that rulers within this immediate network preside over (excluding members of the same dynasty). We calculate this measure once in the full network, and once in a network without the daughter's marriage link to assess the quality of marriage links.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>To capture the consequences of fiscal centralization, we focus on the marriage success of daughters and not of the rulers themselves, which might have been determined before the institutional reforms. Also, marriages of noble daughters were more directly linked to princely revenues, for example, through the payment of dowries.

<sup>46</sup>The difference between married and unmarried connectedness will be weakly positive, since a daughter cannot be less connected by adding a link to her network.

TABLE VIII  
MARRIAGE GAINS.

	Connectedness Gains			
	Rulers		Land Holdings	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treated	0.289 (0.140)	0.285 (0.159)	0.700 (0.537)	0.774 (0.616)
Treated × Decades Since		−0.00228 (0.0298)		0.0402 (0.135)
Observations	4296	4296	4296	4296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.31	0.31	0.36	0.36
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of estimating the analogue to equation (4), considering the logarithm of the marriage success for territory  $j$  in year  $t$  as an outcome. Observations are at the territory-year level. The sample only includes secular territories that eventually fiscally centralize. The sample comprises 390 years and 29 secular territories. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

We estimate the effect of fiscal centralization on marriage outcomes through an analogue of equation (4), where the outcome is the logarithm of the marriage success for territory  $j$  in year  $t$ .<sup>47</sup> Table VIII presents results. The outcomes of marriage politics improve after the adoption of a Chamber: a daughter’s immediate network comprises 29% more rulers after her marriage (column 1), and the number of ruled cities in their network increases by 70% (column 3).

Panels A and B in Figure 5 show marriage gains in an event-study framework. There are no clearly discernible, immediate pretrends for both the number of rulers and the number of ruled cities within the network.<sup>48</sup> Following fiscal centralization, there is a large and persistent increase in inheritance claims gained by marriage: rulers’ daughters have more successful marriages after the introduction of a Chamber.<sup>49</sup>

6.5. Mediation Analysis

To conclude, we provide evidence that our proposed mechanisms map empirically into improved consolidation outcomes for those territories that have a Chamber. We identify two features of territories that limit or improve access to our proposed mechanisms: for the case of building military infrastructure, we consider whether the Chamber ordinance

<sup>47</sup>To account for limited coverage of the dynasty data, we restrict the sample to secular territories that eventually fiscally centralize. We furthermore exclude all rulers who never had marriage-age daughters.

<sup>48</sup>Coefficients more than eight decades prior to treatment are not centered at zero. Note that the historical reasons for sample imbalance discussed in Section 5.4 are more severe in this data context, since the genealogical information on noble lineages and marriage networks is sparse and less reliable for years pre-1500.

<sup>49</sup>An alternative definition of dynasty connectedness is mean “closeness” to the three closest rulers, defined as the inverse of the number of degrees of separation. No connected rulers implies a closeness of 0, and being married to a ruler implies a closeness of 1. To account for land holdings, we weight closeness values with the number of cities the closest (second-closest, third-closest) ruler reigns over. Results are comparable (Supplemental Appendix, Table D.XXV and Figure D.4).

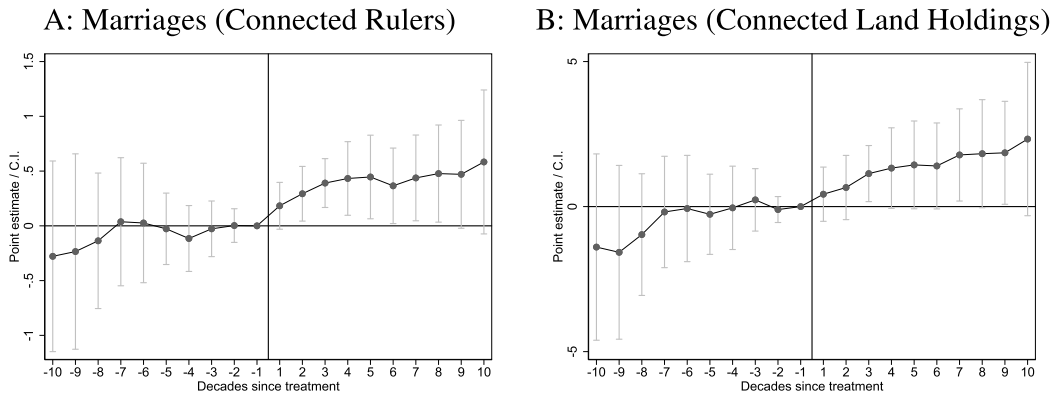


FIGURE 5.—Mechanisms Event Studies (II). *Note:* The plot shows results of an event study regression of the effect of fiscal centralization on ruler daughters' marriage gains, with 95% confidence intervals. Observations are at the territory-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 29 secular territories. The dependent variables are the logarithm of the marriage success for territory  $j$  in year  $t$ , defined either (A) as gains in close territorial rulers or (B) ruled cities. Standard errors are clustered at the territory level.

explicitly included a construction mandate; for the case of marriage success, we consider whether the ruler had any female offspring.<sup>50</sup>

In a mediation exercise, we repeat our main analysis including an interaction term of the treatment with the presence of a feature amplifying the mechanism of interest. Panel A in Table IX considers the interaction with a construction mandate in the Chamber ordinance, and panel B considers the presence of daughters.

It is important to note that the statistical power of our analysis is limited given the small number of territories for which the interaction term equals to one. Accordingly, ex post power calculations yield large minimum detectable effect sizes.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, for both mechanisms, the estimated interaction coefficients point in the expected direction as well as being quantitatively meaningful (in five out of six of cases) and statistically significant in one case.<sup>52</sup>

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we trace the early stages of the development of fiscal capacity. We study the Holy Roman Empire from 1400 to 1789, a time and setting that was marked by profound state consolidation that reorganized the political landscape of Europe. Using a novel and extensive data set, we show that the introduction of Chambers, the first step toward a modern fiscal administration, increased the probability of survival, size, and compactness of territories—three key elements of state consolidation. By introducing a centralized administrative layer that specialized on fiscal problems, territories were able

<sup>50</sup>Specifically, we identify territories where the first ruler who had a Chamber at his disposal throughout the entire reign (i.e., the successor of the ruler who introduced it) had any female offspring.

<sup>51</sup>Drawing on Schochet (2022), we find that a conservatively estimated MDE of the construction mandate interaction for territory size and compactness outcomes, respectively, is 2.07 and 1.89 times that of the baseline MDE, and the MDE for the daughter mechanism interaction 1.28 and 1.17 times the baseline MDE. The methodology cannot be used to output meaningful MDEs in our vanishing sample, due to its hazard structure.

<sup>52</sup>In the Supplemental Appendix, Table D.XXVI, we present results based on data-driven definitions of mechanism access.

TABLE IX  
MEDIATION ANALYSIS.

	Vanishing		Size		Compactness	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Panel A: Chamber Controls Construction</i>						
Treated	−0.194 (0.0296)	−0.191 (0.0301)	0.225 (0.0608)	0.167 (0.0665)	3.736 (1.239)	3.350 (1.444)
Treated × Mechanism		−0.0166 (0.0477)		0.314 (0.130)		2.090 (2.385)
<i>Panel B: Ruler Has Daughter</i>						
Treated	−0.194 (0.0296)	−0.219 (0.0312)	0.225 (0.0608)	0.157 (0.0655)	3.736 (1.239)	2.301 (1.554)
Treated × Mechanism		0.0574 (0.0350)		0.152 (0.121)		3.259 (2.340)
Observations	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825	102,825
Territory FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Note:* The table presents results of estimating the effect of differential access to Chamber mechanisms on the consolidation outcomes from Section 5. The panels distinguish different exogenous drivers of mechanism access: territories where the first ruler who had a Chamber at his disposal throughout the entire reign (i.e., the successor of the ruler who introduced it) had any female offspring (panel A), or territories in which the Chamber ordinance explicitly included a construction mandate (panel B). Observations are at the territory-year level. The sample comprises 390 years and 636 territories. The dependent variables are a binary variable that reflects whether a territory  $j$  vanishes due to conflict or purchase in year  $t$  (columns 1 and 2), the natural logarithm of cities in territory  $j$  in year  $t$  it rules alone (columns 3 and 4), the compactness measure defined at the level of territories in each year  $t$  (columns 5 and 6).

to resolve administrative inefficiencies and increase their revenues. This allowed rulers to invest in the military, making them more successful in conflicts with other territories, and to pursue strategic marriages, forming linkages with other, powerful families. The results of this paper speak to the broader literature on fiscal capacity and state consolidation. One implication of our findings is that specialized institutions, staffed with professional bureaucrats, are fundamental in explaining the rise and consolidation of modern states.

While our research has shed light on the outward effects of fiscal centralization on the growth and consolidation of territories, we want to conclude with some considerations on the internal consequences of Chamber adoption. At a critical juncture in the 16th century, this institution tilted the internal power balance increasingly in the favor of territorial rulers, at the expense of early parliaments (Estates). Chambers were ideally situated to play a central role in this internal consolidation of territories. As state finances became increasingly important, so did the financial bureaucracy. At the center of the princely administration—Chambers officials often were the only point of contact between rulers and their subjects—they amassed more competences over the centuries, and grew to become the largest and most important administrative agency in many territories of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>53</sup> This naturally came at the expense of other institutions, most notably reducing the importance of advisory councils (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, pp. 314, 332, 337, 579)).

<sup>53</sup>For example, in Bavaria the Chamber soon after its introduction became the largest government office; similarly in Brunswick-Calenberg and the Electoral Palatinate (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, pp. 582, 754, 568; also pp. 331, 337)).

By virtue of their bureaucratic capacity, over the long run Chambers also assumed an increasing number of fiscal tasks that had been traditionally associated with the Estates (Reuschling (1984, p. 20)).<sup>54</sup> Estatal diets were increasingly relegated to separate, considerably less powerful, committees. Territories growing in size further eroded the power of Estates, as newly acquired territories were put under direct fiscal control of the Chamber. The financial base, and hence the importance of Chambers grew steadily, in parallel with the progressive fading of the role of Estates. In terms of the historical “bifurcation” between absolutism and parliamentary control (Cox, Dincecco, and Onorato (2022)), the taxation-representation nexus was resolved in favor of absolutist regimes with the fiscal bureaucracy at their center. Empirical studies of other historical trajectories will shed further light on the nexus between bureaucracy, taxation, and state consolidation.

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<sup>54</sup> After the introduction of a Chamber in Ansbach, a committee of the Estates, tasked with fiscal auditing, was dissolved and its tasks transferred to the Chamber with reference to its superior fiscal-bureaucratic capacity (Schaupp (2004, p. 116)); similarly in Bavaria, Hesse, Würzburg, and Albertine Saxony (Jeserich, Pohl, and von Unruh (1983, pp. 589, 824), Krüger (1980, p. 113), Reuschling (1984, p. 20), Heß (1993, p. 22)).



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Co-editor Alessandro Lizzeri handled this manuscript.

Manuscript received 1 March, 2022; final version accepted 6 August, 2024; available online 6 August, 2024.

The replication package for this paper is available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13141937>. The Journal checked the data and codes included in the package for their ability to reproduce the results in the paper and approved online appendices.